

Windowsill Salad: 5 Greens You Can Grow Anywhere

Posted on January 12, 2016 by Sophia Bielenberg

For years I bemoaned the arrival of winter, as much for the shortage of local vegetables as for the long months of cold and darkness we have here in Northern Vermont. But two years ago I had an epiphany that changed all that, and suddenly winter was a season I (almost) looked forward to.



Pea and sunflower shoots growing on the windowsill

My discovery? Growing food is almost effortless indoors. I could still eat homegrown greens and feel the joy of watching seeds germinate, but gone were the sunburns and backaches, the late frosts and surprise storms. Planting in warmth and comfort, harvest meaning a quick trip upstairs with a pair of scissors, not to mention the incredible freshness of the greens—it seemed too good to be true. Now windowsill salads are so much a part of my life and diet, it hardly seems a novelty any more. But I still get an electric jolt of excitement every day that another tray germinates, when green life springs from black dirt as if every day were springtime.



A Microgreens Trial at High Mowing

What are Shoots & Microgreens?

The small greens I grow indoors are called shoots and microgreens. They are grown almost identically—shoots just refers to pea shoots, sunflower shoots and wheatgrass, whereas microgreens include a broad array of varieties. Because shoots are grown from larger seeds, they benefit from

soaking before planting, need a little more soil to grow in, and there is more variation in when they are harvested. With shoots I fill the tray about $\frac{3}{4}$ " deep with potting soil, but for microgreens I use only a $\frac{1}{2}$ " or so, since the small plants don't need much soil in their short lives. Microgreens can be harvested when just the first true leaf has just appeared, or can be allowed to grow longer while retaining quality and tenderness, to what I call the "teen green" stage, when the plants have two true leaves.

5 Easy Greens

Now that I've been growing shoots and microgreens for a while, I like to experiment with a lot of different varieties—in particular I like to grow basil, cilantro and arugula so that I always have these versatile flavors on hand. Some microgreens, like basil, require extra warmth for strong germination, so I use a seedling heat mat when starting them. But most of them don't need any extra heat, and the only equipment to get started is a sunny window (or shop lights), tray, propagation dome, soil and seeds (you can find the tray, dome and soil in our seed starting kit). If you're growing on a windowsill instead of using shop lights, use a South-facing window and rotate your trays every day.

Pea Shoots are simple to grow, versatile in the kitchen, and perfect for any dish that calls for peas. I like adding them to pasta dishes such as macaroni and cheese or Pasta Carbonara.



Fresh pea shoots

Soak your pea seeds overnight before scattering them thickly over the soil surface (I use about 1 ½-2 cups for a 1020 tray), then cover with your propagation dome until they sprout. They thrive in cooler temperatures and will do just fine on chilly windowsills. I start harvesting them when they get about 4 inches tall, and have found that they'll even regrow a few times.



Sunflower shoots

Sunflower Shoots have a succulent texture and delectable buttery flavor great for salads. They are ready to harvest in about 3 days, so if you want to eat them regularly, you'll need to plant them often.

Soak the seeds for a few hours before scattering them over the soil surface (I use about 1 cup for a 1020 tray), then water in and cover with your dome until they sprout. Watch them carefully because the window to harvest them is short—their cotyledons (the very first leaves that appear) should have just unfolded. With sunflower shoots it's best to harvest the entire tray at this stage and then start the next one; if you let them grow true leaves, they will be tough and bitter-tasting.

Arugula Microgreens are one of my favorite indoor greens—their peppery flavor

is so good in so many things, from entrées to salads, garnishes to sandwiches. You can harvest them at almost any stage, since they stay tasty and tender for a long time.

Simply sprinkle the seed over the soil (it's best to sow a little less when growing crops with larger leaves), sprinkle a little more soil over the seed, water in and cover with your dome until they sprout.



Arugula Microgreens



Red Russian Kale Microgreens

Red Kale Microgreens are another favorite because they're so pretty with their lavender stems and frilly true leaves. They're also wonderfully versatile—I like that they have a little more heft to them, so I can throw them into miso soup, add to a stirfry or sauté with other veggies. They're grown in the same way as arugula, and likewise can be

harvested at almost any stage, from just cotyledons to baby-sized leaves.

Mild Mix Microgreens (and many other greens mixes) are perfect for salads, sandwiches and garnishes. The blend of flavors, textures and colors are exciting on the palate or plate, but still versatile enough for a wide range of uses. Sow these just like you would arugula, and try harvesting at different stages to see what you like best!



Mild Mix Microgreens

Tips for Success

After several years of growing indoor greens, I've learned a few things that have made it easier.

- Start your greens on the same day every week. It's a great way to ensure you

have a consistent supply, and if you miss your day you can make a point to do it the following day, no harm done.

- Never let your trays dry out! The tiny plants wilt very quickly if the soil becomes dry. Your trays will dry faster if the air is dry, if you use a small amount of soil or if your greens are growing rapidly. I check my trays every day and water lightly almost every morning to prevent them from drying out.
- Divide your trays. Even if you really, really love sunflower shoots, you might not be able to eat them in time before they toughen up. Start by growing two or three varieties per tray, and if you find you can eat them all, grow full trays.
- Grow what you love to eat. Obsessed with [amaranth](#)? Can't get enough [cress](#)? Experiment with crops you're crazy about even if they're not being sold specifically as microgreens (my favorites are lemony [sorrel](#) and [cilantro](#)).

[Cilantro](#) isn't for everyone, but if you're in the fold of cilantro lovers (like me), you probably want it all the time for topping Mexican and Asian dishes. I don't soak the seeds, I just sprinkle them thickly over the soil in the tray, then sprinkle a little more soil over them, water in and cover with the dome. They do take longer to germinate than almost everything else, so be patient and plant often!



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2 Responses to *Windowsill Salad: 5 Greens You Can Grow Anywhere*



Sandy Dimond says:

January 14, 2016 at 9:36 am

live on second floor apartment facing south. Have been working at growing veggies/flowers for shade and food for 2 years. This year going to try stacking 2 L milk/pop bottles and see how that works. The bigger containers make it very difficult to access plants and take up all the room on my narrow balcony. Open to all suggestions.

[Reply](#)



David Vetterlein says:

January 14, 2016 at 1:49 pm

INDOOR GARDENING: Seed to Salad in Seven Days
Burke, Peter

Reply

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